



By Mike Keefe for USA TODAY

LETTERS

McNamara's book 'a slap in the face to all veterans'

So 20 years later in a book, Robert McNamara admits the Vietnam War was a mistake ("McNamara: Vietnam War 'wrong,'" News, Monday). Hogwash. What a slap in the face to all us veterans. The intent was right. We all know politicians start wars and young men fight them. If those in power had let the military do its job the way it wanted to, the war would have been over quickly. Now we have learned our lesson. The next time the big shots start a war, butt out and let the experts win it for them.

Frank Slason
Jefferson, Maine

'Error' unforgivable

Robert McNamara now states that "we were terribly wrong." He should be tried as a war criminal.

His dogmatic policies resulted in the most terrible tragedy this country has suffered since the Civil War. The proof: the black wall in Washington with the names of our brave Vietnam War dead. Also, the terrible agony their families and the families of the MIAs have suffered. Add to that thousands of veterans whose bodies are shattered and who are living tragedies.

We call for a tribunal for Bosnia. Why

not for McNamara? Do the Israelis forgive the Holocaust because the perpetrators have aged? Neither should we!

Add to our losses the tremendous national debt Vietnam cost and the terrible price the Vietnamese people paid for his "error." McNamara ranks with Hitler and Stalin as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity. Now he has torn open Vietnam's wounds throughout this country.

Any profits from his book should be labeled reparations and should go to families who lost loved ones and to disabled Vietnam veterans. He should not profit from the tragedy he caused.

Curtis D. Westphal
Retired Air Force colonel
Austin, Texas

Gulf war successful model

It is amazing that with all these years to reflect and with the gulf war to stand as an example of how to conduct a successful military operation, Robert McNamara has still not realized the real lesson of the Vietnam tragedy. Not having victory as a clear objective is the real lesson of Vietnam. The rest is just details of a failed policy.

As a military officer who served in Vietnam, I experienced firsthand the frustra-

tion of having to fight in a war with our hands tied behind our backs. Using "high-tech equipment in fighting committed guerrillas" was not the biggest problem we faced. The biggest problem to winning the war was the military was not allowed to do the job it was trained to do. Instead, military decisions were made by reckless, uninformed civilians who didn't know what they were doing. For example, some military targets in Vietnam were designated from the White House.

In contrast, gulf war military commanders were given victory as a clearly defined objective and theater commanders given the flexibility to do their job effectively. The result was a successful operation with minimum casualties.

Vietnam could have come to a successful conclusion much earlier with much less loss of life on both sides. Ideas for an end to the Vietnam War were held by many people inside and outside the military, but the political leadership in the country and Robert McNamara, in particular, were blind to them.

I suppose if McNamara had stayed at Ford he would still be building Edsels.

Jeffrey P. Baker
Sandy, Utah